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SUBJECT: GEORGIA PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION UPDATE MAY 27

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On May 27, with 3604 precincts reporting, the ruling United National Movement has 59.22 percent of the vote in Georgia's parliamentary elections. This will likely give them a total of 120 out of 150 seats in Parliament. The opposition parties held a protest on May 26 against what they deem "falsified elections." The Joint Opposition has called for a boycott of the new Parliament and creation of an "alternative Parliament." Still, four opposition candidates have already stated their intention to join the new Parliament, regardless of a boycott. Other parties, such as Giorgi Targamadze's Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM), are still debating whether or not to join the Parliament. On May 24-25, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and representatives of the EC and Council of Europe (CoE) met with opposition parties to discuss election complaints and appeals with Giga Bokeria, representing the government's Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF). At an OSCE Ambassadorial Working Group (AWG) on May 27, the head of ODIHR urged bilateral missions to be cautious in their welcoming remarks, noting that ODIHR's statement was a compromise between 5 different groups and implying that more criticism may be in their final report. Germany, the UK, and the U.S. noted clear progress in the January presidential elections. Following the May 26 protests, opposition leaders confronted the Director of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) in his office, alleging biased GPB coverage against the opposition. On May 27, the GPB Board Chairman resigned, also claiming the GPB's "biased its coverage" of the opposition protests. End Summary.

UNM Wins Big, and Then Some

¶2. (SBU) On May 27, with 3604 precincts (out of 3635) reporting, the ruling United National Movement has 59.22 percent of the vote in Georgia's parliamentary elections. This will likely give them a total of 120 seats in Parliament out of 150, according to the USAID-funded International Republican Institute (IRI). This is well over the two-thirds majority they need to change the constitution, although President Saakashvili said publicly on May 22 that the ruling party has no plans to change the "without the participation of the opposition." With 17.71 percent of the vote, the Joint Opposition will likely receive 14 party-list seats and 2 majoritarian seats. The CDM will receive 6 party-list seats with 8.63 percent of the vote, and the Labor party will receive 6 party list seats with 7.43 percent of the vote. The Republicans failed to meet the party-list threshold of 5 percent, garnering only 3.78.

Joint Opposition Protests, Wants Alternative Parliament

¶3. (SBU) The Joint Opposition has called for the formation of an "alternative Parliament," and has called for those winning opposition candidates to boycott the new Parliament. This

"alternative Parliament" will allegedly be located in the New Rightists' party headquarters. Some opposition leaders, such as Targamadze and Paata Davitaia have dismissed such a structure as an unrealistic solution. Some in the National Movement have pointed out that a similar "alternative Parliament" was created in 1991-2, leading to Georgia's civil war under Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

14. (SBU) The opposition parties held a protest on May 26, calling the elections fraudulent, and attempting to "break up" the Independence Day parade on the same day. The GOG, however, moved the timing of the parade ahead an hour to avoid a confrontation. Nearly 20,000 protesters joined the scene at its height. The crowd was older, and evenly mixed with men and women. Police acted calmly and even cleared Rustaveli Avenue in order to allow the protesters to gather in front of Parliament. The Republicans and CDM attended the protests, although neither joined in the anti-U.S. or anti-Western rhetoric.

Four Opposition Candidates to Join Parliament

15. (SBU) Four opposition candidates have already stated their intention to join the new Parliament, regardless of a boycott. These include Paata Davitaia and Giorgi Lortkipanidze of the Joint Opposition, Nugzar Ergemlidze from the Labor Party, and the Republicans' majoritarian candidate from Tsageri, Karlo Koaliani. We heard May 27 that the second Republican candidate also plans to enter Parliament. Targamadze has not yet committed to the boycott. (Comment: The CDM is reportedly under significant pressure from the Joint Opposition and Labor parties to boycott Parliament. It appears that the CDM understands there is little to be gained

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from boycotting Parliament, that the "alternative Parliament" is a dead end, and that the Joint Opposition may be painting themselves into a corner. More to be reported septel. End comment.)

Opposition, Internationals, and IATF Meet

16. (SBU) On May 24-25, the government's Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), represented by Giga Bokeria, met with opposition parties and local NGOs to discuss their election complaints and appeals. The EC and CoE Ambassadors were present, as well as the National Democratic Institute (NDI). EC Ambassador Per Eklund said garnering specific information from the opposition parties was difficult, and that only two of the opposition's complaints were clearly justified (and subsequently addressed by the Government). The first was a refusal to accept a written complaint because it was filed one minute late (although begun earlier). Bokeria said the complaint would be accepted. The second involved late registration of UNM voters in districts where they did not normally reside. After review, it was deemed that the registrations were possibly unethical, though not technically illegal. Eklund believed that the opposition was radicalized and focused on pre-existing allegations of wrongdoing, rather than presenting substantial new evidence of systemic problems.

OSCE Ambassadors Meet

17. (SBU) On May 27, an OSCE Ambassadorial Working Group, heard Ambassador Boris Frlec, Head of ODIHR, state that ODIHR's preliminary statement of findings (emailed to EUR/CARC) was a "compromise document" among 5 different groups. He implied that ODIHR's final report may be more critical. He noted that criticism in ODIHR reports is meant to be constructive, and further democratic development. Finally, he asked the group not to be "too enthusiastic in your initial appraisals of the electoral process."

¶8. (SBU) Germany, the UK, and the Embassy noted significant progress in these parliamentary elections compared to the January elections. The German and UK Ambassadors responded to the French Ambassador's question of whether these parliamentary elections "should be accepted by the international community, as they would not be acceptable in Germany or France." The German Ambassador noted that the criteria for these elections should not be whether or not they met Western European standards - noting that this would be impossible in Georgia considering the Tsarist, Communist, and Civil War history here. Rather, Germany's benchmark was whether the trend of these elections was positive and in the right direction. Germany assessed it was. The U.S., UK, Germany, and the EC Ambassador agreed that the elections expressed real improvement in the Government's efforts, including especially responses to complaints. The Bulgarian, German, and CoE Ambassadors each noted the positive and noticeable impact of the training election officials received prior to the election (the majority of which was funded by USAID). The CoE Ambassador said this was the first time in his four years in Georgia that the IATF responded aggressively to complaints, and a court overturned a District Election Commission decision. He said "this is new momentum."

Opposition Confront GPB, Chairman Resigns

¶9. (U) Following the May 26 protests, several opposition leaders, including Giorgi Khaindrava, Salome Zourabichvili, Zviad Dzidziguri, and Davit Saganelidze, confronted the Director of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB), Levan Kubaneishvili, in his office. They accused him of "taking orders from Saakashvili" and providing negative coverage of the opposition. Kubaneishvili rebuffed the charges, noting that the GPB dedicated 39 minutes of news coverage to the protest rallies. He reportedly said "this TV channel will not come under the influence of any political group."

¶10. (SBU) On May 27, the Chairman of the GPB's Supervisory Board, Irakli Tripolski, resigned. He claimed the GPB was not following the law which requires it to be objective in its reporting. (Comment: Our local staff believe that the GPB is objective and balanced in its reporting. This view was also that of ODIHR in its May 14 interim report. End comment.)
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